

IN THE CLAIMS:

The following is a complete listing of all of the claims. Please amend the claims as follows:

1. **(Currently Amended)** A protective skin leading edge member for an aircraft, the leading edge member comprising:

~~a leading edge member forming a forward portion of an airfoil surface, the leading edge member having an exterior surface and an opposing interior surface forming a surface thickness therebetween;~~

wherein at least one pocket is recessed into the interior surface of the leading edge member, each pocket defining a region of the leading edge member having a pocket thickness that is less than the surface thickness of the leading edge member, each pocket being configured to deform in response to an impact from an object with the leading edge member, the at least one pocket being disposed solely within the leading edge member;

wherein the leading edge member is configured for attachment to a substructure;

wherein the leading edge member is configured for forming a forward portion of an airfoil;

wherein the substructure is at least one of a substructure of a vertical fin, a substructure of a horizontal stabilizer, and a substructure of a wing member; and

wherein the leading edge member is configured to protect the substructure by absorbing an impact energy from a collision with the object.

2. **(Currently Amended)** The protective skin leading edge member according to claim 1, wherein the leading edge member forms the leading edge of a wing member.

3. **(Currently Amended)** The protective skin leading edge member according to claim 1, wherein the leading edge member forms the leading edge of a horizontal stabilizer.

4. **(Currently Amended)** The protective skin leading edge member according to claim 1, wherein the leading edge member forms the leading edge of a vertical fin.

5. **(Currently Amended)** The protective skin leading edge member according to claim 1, wherein the pockets are formed by a chemical etching process.

6. **(Currently Amended)** The protective skin leading edge member according to claim 1, wherein the pockets are formed by a mechanical milling process.

7. **(Currently Amended)** The protective skin leading edge member according to claim 1, wherein the leading edge member is curved about a longitudinal axis so as to form an upper airfoil surface and a lower airfoil surface.

8. **(Currently Amended)** The protective skin leading edge member according to claim 7, wherein the at least one pocket comprises:

a plurality of pockets arranged in a selected pattern over the interior surfaces of the upper airfoil surface and the lower airfoil surface.

9. **(Currently Amended)** The protective skin leading edge member according to claim 8, wherein each pocket is formed in one of the following geometric shapes: circle, oval, rectangle, square.

10. **(Currently Amended)** The protective skin leading edge member according to claim 8, wherein the pattern of pockets on the interior surface of the upper airfoil surface is a mirror image of the pattern of pockets on the interior surface of the lower airfoil surface.

11. **(Currently Amended)** The protective skin leading edge member according to claim 8, wherein the pattern of pockets on the interior surface of the upper airfoil surface is not a mirror image of the pattern of pockets on the interior surface of the lower airfoil surface.

12. **(Currently Amended)** The protective skin leading edge member according to claim 1, further comprising:

at least one rib member connected to the interior surface of the leading edge member for attaching the leading edge member to [[a]] the substructure of the aircraft.

13. **(Currently Amended)** The protective skin leading edge member according to claim 1, further comprising:

a stiffening means connected to the interior surface of the leading edge member for providing localized stiffness to the leading edge member.

14. **(Currently Amended)** The protective skin leading edge member according to claim 13, wherein the stiffening means is an elongated I-shaped beam.

15. **(Currently Amended)** The protective skin leading edge member according to claim 13, wherein the stiffening means is not connected to [[a]] the substructure of the aircraft.

16. **(Currently Amended)** The protective skin leading edge member according to claim 13, wherein the stiffening means is also connected to [[a]] the substructure of the aircraft.

17. – 20. **(Cancelled)**

21. **(New)** The leading edge member according to claim 1, wherein the leading edge member is attached to the substructure using at least one fastener.

22. **(New)** The leading edge member according to claim 21, wherein the leading edge member is configured for detachment from the substructure by removing the at least one fastener.